

VZCZCXRO9876
PP RUEHAG
DE RUEHCV #1017/01 1011922
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 111922Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4092
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6295
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5371
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1888
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0105
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1963
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3683
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0664
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 1136
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3433
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1133
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO PRIORITY 0117
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY 0729
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0101
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 2992
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0631

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 001017

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/07/2026

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SUBJECT: 1001 STEPS TO OBTAINING A BOLIVARIAN DOCUMENT

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4
(D)

Summary

1. (C) Poloff spent days battling Venezuelan bureaucracy to obtain a Venezuelan birth certificate for his child. The inefficient and Byzantine processes encountered by poloff plague Venezuelan government operations and have become an accepted element of Venezuelan society. Red tape drives wealthy Venezuelans to hire proxies to pay bribes, stand in line, and run errands for them. Venezuela's culture of procedure predates President Hugo Chavez. The public's low expectations for societal efficiency help explain why Chavez remains in power.

Books for the Document for the Document

2. (U) In order to obtain a Venezuelan birth certificate for his newborn daughter, poloff spent days battling Venezuelan bureaucracy. Poloff received one birth certificate upon leaving the hospital. Informed that he needed an official Venezuelan government document to obtain a U.S. Consular Report of Birth Abroad, poloff first took two trips across town to have a public interpreter translate and notarize his wedding license, a Venezuelan requirement for foreigners. Next, poloff went to the mayor of metropolitan Caracas' registry office soon after the building opened. After waiting over two hours, officials began receiving the public. "Your child has not been introduced," said an official. Asked where to "introduce"

the child, the official brushed off poloff to receive the next customer. "The books are not here today," a more helpful official explained. "Come back at the end of the month before 7:00 AM."

Sound Advice: Cheat, or Wait All Day

13. (U) Checking with Venezuelan contacts, poloff tried to get to the bottom of how he went wrong. The Venezuelans advised poloff to try another office. One offered to provide poloff false documentation that would get him in an office run by anti-Chavez officials. Nonetheless, poloff decided to try the first office again, as he had since become familiar with its rules, which did not require his baby to appear in person.

14. (U) Poloff returned weeks later to the office at 6:50 AM for what would become an over three and a half hour process. There were only five people waiting in front of him. When the office opened at 7:00 AM, officials told the customers to sit against the wall outside in order of arrival. Later, a guard warned the customers to make sure they signed up on a list in order of arrival, as well, or they would not be served. Workers began milling onto the grounds about an hour later, and eventually an official came by with the list, on which customers wrote their names and their time of arrival. (Note: requesting the time of arrival was clearly not for quality-control purposes.) Next, another official came by to check the customers' documentation. This official sent poloff to make copies of his passport at a neighborhood store. Poloff protested to no avail that he had the Venezuelan documentation required by the posted rules. Returning with his copies, poloff began waiting outside with the other customers for

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officials inside to call his name. Although the process seemed interminable, none of the other customers--some of whom appeared to be well dressed professionals--complained or appeared the least bit put out.

Human Photocopiers

15. (U) After the customer arriving after him went inside, poloff realized he had missed his name-calling. Because poloff had been listening right by the door, the officials must have either omitted him or, more likely, pronounced his Anglo-sounding name unintelligibly. The obliging officials quickly reestablished poloff's place in line. Next, poloff sat down at an elementary school-sized desk and chairs with two red-clad youths in charge of "the books." "The books" were two huge tomes containing lined pages, each stamped with a Venezuelan government seal. The youths copied by hand the vital, professional, and contact information of poloff, his spouse, and his child into the books, making two identical copies that filled a page. When they made a mistake, they would rub furiously at their penmarks with an eraser, nearly putting holes in the paper. Once finished, they directed poloff to find two witnesses from outside, both of whom would sign and copy their names and identification numbers into each book. One of the youths then wrote poloff a receipt and directed him upstairs.

Let's Start All Over

16. (U) At the next station, an official copied the same information required downstairs into a computer. (Note: another emboff reports he was sent down the street to buy the registry office more paper at this stage of the

process.) Two of the officials and one customer discussed whether to use the number from poloff's diplomatic carnet or his passport. Poloff's assertion that he did not care which number they used did not speed up the process. Just as they were sending for the youths downstairs to rewrite "the books" using the passport number, they seized on the carnet as the appropriate identification upon seeing its number on poloff's hospital birth certificate. Poloff did not disabuse them of their discovery of the official solution by mentioning he had entered the number onto the hospital certificate himself. One of the officials then printed out a certificate and asked poloff to check it for errors. Once assured it was fine, the official told poloff to come back in four days between 1:30 and 4:00 to pick up a copy signed by his boss.

The Home Stretch

17. (U) Poloff returned to the office, this time empty of customers, at the scheduled time and date. He settled down with his newspaper for a long wait. One of the red youths scrubbing earnestly at a book with an eraser got up after a few minutes and handed poloff his signed and stamped certificate. "Have a nice day, amigo," he said.

Comment

18. (C) Poloff never felt like a victim of anti-American discrimination. Rather, the process was an example of the

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cumbersome bureaucracy that has plagued Venezuela since well before the rise of President Hugo Chavez. The way official procedure governs Venezuelan society is apparent even to visitors. Leaving the country from Caracas' international airport at Maiquetia requires passing through up to 12 checkpoints, at which listless officials review passports and ask travelers to present their tickets for the ubiquitous rubber stamp that seems to make local transactions official. Because Venezuela lacks a postal system and credit cards are not widely accepted, paying bills or making reservations in most hotels requires standing in line to make a deposit in businesses' bank accounts. Over the years, the country has developed novel ways of dealing with hassles instead of eliminating them. The country even has its own lexicon for handling bureaucracy. In Venezuelan parlance, a "gestor" is a person hired to stand in line, to battle administrative procedures, and to expedite paperwork by paying bribes. Rich Venezuelans hire "motorizados," or youths on motorcycles, to thread through traffic shuttling papers and requesting rubber stamps for their completed tasks. More than explaining life under the current administration, poloff's experience fighting red tape sheds light on why the Bolivarian President has such staying power. Venezuela has become a nation of people with low expectations.

BROWNFIELD